European Journal of Education Studies
ISSN: 2501 - 1111
ISSN-L: 2501 - 1111
Available on-line at: www.oapub.org/edu

doi: 10.5281/zenodo.1034433 Volume 3 | Issue 10 | 2017

EXAMINING AGGRESSION LEVELS OF ELITE RUGBY ATHLETES IN TERMS OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Levent Bayram[i*], Deniz Özge Yüceloğlu Keskin, Özgür Bostanci, Menderes Kabadayi, Deniz Günay Derebaşi
Ondokuz Mayıs University,
Yaşar Doğu Faculty of Sports Sciences, Turkey

Abstract:
The aim of this research is to study the correlation between the aggression level and communication skills of elite rugby athletes. The study was conducted with a total of 115 rugby athletes (37 female, 78 male) who played on teams that took place in the Turkish Rugby League during 2016-2017. A 4-question demographic survey and the Kiper (1984) Aggression Scale were applied to the athletes as well as the Communication Skills inventory of Ersanlı and Balcı. The group of rugby athletes aged 25 and below was found to be at a higher bold aggression level compared to the group aged 26 and above ($p<0.05$). As for the passive aggression subscale scores, the group aged 25 and below was at a lower level compared to the group aged 26 and above ($p<0.05$). The bold aggression level of rugby athletes with a university education was higher compared to athletes with a high school and elementary education ($p<0.05$). In addition, a positive correlation was found between bold aggression subscale scores and total communication skills scores. As a result, it can be said that the communication skills of athletes need to be increased in order to decrease disruptive and passive aggression and increase bold behavior. As communication skills improve, the possibility of displaying aggressive approaches and behavior decrease.

Keywords: rugby, aggression, communication skills

1. Introduction

Although aggression is a type of behavior that is defined differently by many psychologists, they all agree that aggressive instinct is a part of human nature. The

[i] Correspondence: email levent.bayram@omu.edu.tr

possibility of displaying aggressive behavior can be seen when a person aims for a living being during a situation of disturbance (Kaufmann et al., 1970).

Lorenz (1983) states that aggression serves for the same purpose in humans. According to Lorenz, aggression is a highly dangerous instinct towards the preservation of life. This instinct is within in the human being and waits to emerge. Social learning theoreticians, on the other hand, prefer to explain aggression based on learning.

Aggression is categorized as disruptive aggression, bold aggression and passive aggression. Disruptive aggression is considered equal to hostility-based aggression. Humans may experience complex emotions such as disappointment, sorrow or fear when their expectations do not materialize. An individual experiencing this emotional intensity may display aggressive behavior that is not accepted by society. In this situation, the person believes that a certain source is causing harm, and approaches that source with the intention to harm it in a certain way (Bostan & Kılcıgil, 2008). In boldness, the individual considers the rights of the other person while defending their own personal rights, thoughts and feelings. An athlete is considered bold when they use their physical strength without violating game rules. A boxer who surpasses the opponent with a punch without violating the rules is considered as bold, not aggressive (Dervent et al., 2010).

In order to mention aggression, there needs to be a displayed behavior that aims to do harm, and this harm must be done. This could be physical or psychological. Not only hitting or kicking, but also swearing at someone displays aggression (Tiryaki, 2000).

Sports enhance physical and mental health while the individual tries to reach the peak of personal effort by aiming to compete within rules, feel excited, achieve superiority and increase achievement strength (Aracı, 1999). Aggressive behavior is quite often seen during daily life and sports activities. Although success in sports depends on hindering the opponent, it is actually based on obeying rules (Russell, 1978). The rules of a certain sport and the intention of a certain action are factors that limit aggression in sports activities. The same action is judged differently in other sports. Aggression can be seen more often in sports activities that require physical contact (Tiryaki, 1996). An athlete considers the potential benefits and penalties when violating rules. If the potential benefits outweigh the potential penalties, aggressive behavior will strengthen. Although effort is shown to prevent it, aggressive behavior is an incident that occurs in sports competitions and races (Dervent et al., 2010). Violating game rules and attempting to harm the opponent can be qualified as aggressive behavior. Fatigue, tension brought by the unchanging score, or a physically stronger team are the underlying factors that affect aggressive behavior (Tiryaki, 1996).

According to Weinberg and Gould (1995), athletes act more aggressive usually when they lose, think a match is not conducted properly, feel surprised, experience physical pain or show performance below their capacity.

One of the variables that are linked to aggression is communication skills. Communication is an issue that needs to be studied in terms of its effect on athlete performance. The effective use of communication skills is an important factor that increases athlete and team performance (Abakay, 2013).

Dökmen (2006) defines communication as a process in which participants convey the information they produce to one another, and then try to comprehend and interpret these messages. In short, communication can be defined as "*conveying information to another person in a comprehensible way*" or "*a relationship system formed in order to exchange information between individuals*" (Erdoğan, 1994). In both definitions, communication is a matter of conveying information.

In a sports environment, especially in team sports, individuals are constantly communicating with each other and sharing different feelings and actions during competitions and workouts. Therefore, athletes that belong to a team are expected to have higher communication skills. The aggressive tendencies we often see at schools and stadiums during athletic activities have a negative effect on athletic success. We think that studying the interaction between communication skills and aggressive behavior in rugby, which is a sport that requires a certain level of toughness and physical contact, will help to understand and explain this matter.

The main aim of this research is to discover the correlation between the communication skills and aggression level of elite rugby athletes in terms of age, gender and education level. Also, investigation of the correlation between communication skills and aggression level was aimed in the study**.**

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted with a total of 115 rugby athletes (37 female, 78 male) who played on teams that took place in the Turkish Rugby League during 2016-2017. A 4-question demographic survey and the Kiper (1984) Aggression Scale were applied to the athletes as well as the Communication Skills Inventory of Ersanlı and Balcı.

2.1 Aggression Scale

The "Aggression Inventory", which was developed by Ilter Kiper (1984), was used in order to determine the aggression levels of the rugby athletes in this study. The inventory contained 30 items and 3 subtests. The subtests were: disruptive aggression, boldness and passive aggression. For each subtest, 10 items were determined. The items

related to disruptive aggression were determined as; 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 29, boldness as; 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 28, and passive aggression as; 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27, 30. The materials used for the inventory were a question form and answer sheets. Answers were given according to the 7-point likert scale and could be answered with: "strongly disagree: -3", "somewhat disagree: -2", "disagree: -1", "undecided: 0", "agree: +1", "somewhat agree: +2", "strongly agree: +3". Theoretically, a participant who answered each question on each subtest with "strongly agree" would receive a total score of +30. Similarly, a participant who answered with "strongly disagree" would receive a score of -30. Yet, since minus scores cannot be used statistically and the number zero poses a problem during statistical analysis, 31 was added to each total score. Thus, the lowest and highest scores received from each subtest were respectively 1 and 61. Based on the total scores received from each subtest, an overall aggression score was attained for each participant (Güner, 2006).

2.2 Communication Skills Inventory

This inventory was developed by Ersanlı and Balcı (1996) as a 5-point likert survey. This survey is used in order measure communication skills in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspect. There are 15 items that measure each aspect. The items for each aspect are listed below:

Cognitive: 1,3,6,12,15,17,18,20,24,28,30,33,37,43,45

Emotional: 5,9,11,26,27,29,31,34,35,36,38,39,40,42,44

Behavioral: 2,4,7,8,10,13,14,16,19,21,22,23,25,32,41

The items could be answered with: "always", "usually", "sometimes", "rarely" and "never". A high score in each aspect and a high overall (total) score corresponded to high communication skills. In order to test reliability, Ersanlı and Balcı (1998) applied this inventory to a group of 170 people one month after applying it to 500 university students. In the reliability study conducted with the split-half test method, the split-half reliability coefficient was found as r=.64. In the study conducted with the test-retest method, it was found as r=.68. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated in order to determine the internal consistency of the scale, and it was found to be .72. As a result of the factor analysis, it was seen that the items formed three categories. Based on their contents, these categories were named cognitive, emotional and behavioral communication skills. The correlation between each aspect and the total communication skills score was found to be respectively .83, .73 and .82. In the validity study that was carried out with the "Communication Skills Evaluation Scale", which was developed by Korkut (1996), the validity coefficient of the scale was found to be .70 (Ersanlı & Balcı, 1988).

2.3 Scoring of the Communication Skills Survey:

The Communication Skills Survey consisted of 45 items (15 negative and 30 positive) that were written according to the 5-point likert scale (A: Always, B: Usually, C: Sometimes, D: Rarely, E: Never). The positive items could be marked as (5,4,3,2,1) and the negative items as (1,2,3,4,5). The lowest and highest scores that could be received from the survey were respectively 45 and 225. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in order to determine whether the distribution was regular or not. The Student-t and Anova tests were used for groups that showed regular distribution while the Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal tests were used for the ones that did not show regular distribution. Arithmetic Averages and Standard Deviations were found. The statistical significance level was determined at p<0,05, and p<0,01. The SPSS 17.0 program was used to analyze the collected data.

3. Findings

Table 1: Comparison of the Total Aggression Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on the Gender Variable

	Gender	N	Median	Min	Max	P
Total Aggression Score	Female	37	105	86	160	0,582
	Male	78	105,50	23	164	
Boldness	Female	37	39	25	61	0,115
	Male	78	47	16	61	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

Table 2: Comparison of the Aggression Subscale Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on Gender Variable

	Gender	N	AVG	SD	P
Passive Aggression	Female	37	35,24	11,325	0,236
	Male	78	30,71	11,731	
Disruptive Aggression	Female	37	34,86	11,731	0,054
	Male	78	32,31	11,429	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

According to Table 1 and Table 2, a statistically significant difference was not found between the sub-dimensions of passive aggression and disruptive aggression in terms of gender (p<0,05).

Table 3: Comparison of the Total Aggression, Bold Aggression and Passive Aggression Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on the Age Variable

	Age	N	Median	Min	Max	P
Total Aggression Score	Age 25 and below	62	105	23	157	0,300
	Age 26 and above	53	105	86	164	
Boldness	Age 25 and below	62	49,50	16	61	**0,000****
	Age 26 and above	53	40	25	57	
Passive Aggression	Age 25 and below	62	30	5	59	**0,007****
	Age 26 and above	53	34	12	55	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

Table 4: Comparison of the Disruptive Aggression Subscale Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on the Age Variable

	Age	N	AVG	SD	P
Disruptive Aggression	Age 25 and below	62	30,03	11,951	0,152
	Age 26 and above	53	36,75	9,975	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

The aggression scores and sub-dimension scores of the athletes, in terms of the age variable, are compared in Table 3 and Table 4. In both bold and passive aggression sub-dimension scores, a highly significant difference was found in favor of the athletes below age 25 (p<0,01). However, a significant difference was not found between the total aggression and disruptive aggression sub-dimension scores in terms of age (p<0,05).

Table 5: Comparison of the Total Aggression Scores and Bold Aggression Subscale Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on the Education Level Variable

	Education Level	N	Med	Min	Max	P
Total Aggression Scores	Elementary	17	105	88	164	0,955
	High School	25	105	88	155	
	University	73	106	23	160	
Boldness	Elementary	17	36	25	54	**0,000****
	High School	25	36	25	57	
	University	73	49	16	61	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

Table 6: Comparison of the Passive and Disruptive Subscale Scores of Rugby Athletes Based on the Education Level Variable

	Education Level	**N**	**AVG**	**SD**	**P**
Passive Aggression	Elementary	17	34,06	10,232	0,057
	High School	25	36,44	9,553	
	University	73	30,26	12,406	
	Total	115	32,17	11,747	
Disruptive Aggression	Elementary	17	36,65	7,599	0,169
	High School	25	35,12	11,069	
	University	73	31,63	12,27	
	Total	115	33,13	11,538	

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

The total aggression scores and sub-dimension scores of the athletes are compared in terms of education level in Table 5 and Table 6. According to this, in the boldness sub-dimension, a high statistically significant difference was found in favor of university graduates (p<0,01). However, a significant difference was not found between total aggression, passive aggression and disruptive aggression scores (p<0,05).

Table 7: Correlation between Total Aggression/Aggression Subscales and Communication Skills of Rugby Athletes

		Communication Skills
Boldness	r	**,428****
	p	**0,000**
Passive Aggression	r	-0,158
	p	0,091
Disruptive Aggression	r	-0,12
	p	0,203
Total Aggression	r	0,049
	p	0,605

**p<0,01; *p<0,05

While a positively strong correlation is seen between communication skills and boldness (p<0,01) in Table 7, a significant correlation was not found between communication skills and total aggression/other sub-dimension scores.

4. Discussion

In this study, the correlation between the aggression levels and communication skills of elite ruby athletes was studied.

In our research, a statistically significant difference was not found in the total aggression and aggression sub-dimensions of the athletes based on the gender variable. In their studies, in which they compared aggression subscale average scores based on gender, Dervent et al. (2010), Yıldırım and Abakay (2015), and Erşan et al. (2009) did not find a significant difference between the scores of males and females ($p>0,05$). Unlike our research, the study conducted by Karabulut (2013) found an important difference in the disruptive aggression score averages and bold aggression score averages of athletes based on the gender variable ($p<0,05$). In another study (Çolakoğlu and Solak, 2014), bold aggression scores showed a significant difference in terms of gender.

In our study, an important difference was found in the aggression sub-dimensions and the total score averages of the athletes, and in the bold and passive aggression dimensions based on the age variable ($p<0,05$). Afyon et al. (2015) found a similar result in the bold aggression dimension of football athletes based on the age variable.

In our study, a positive correlation was found between bold aggression and total communication skills scores. Yıldırım and Abakay (2015) found a positively weak correlation between the communication skills and boldness level of male hockey players. Thus, it can be stated that as the communication skills of rugby players increase, their boldness and aggressive behavior increase as well.

In our research, it was found that the bold aggression level of rugby athletes with university education was higher compared to the athletes with high school or elementary education. Although a statistically significant difference was not seen between the passive aggression/disruptive aggression sub-dimensions and education level, it was found that the passive and disruptive aggression scores of athletes with university education were lower compared to the athletes with elementary or high school education. Özkamalı (2005) studied the correlation between anger and education, and stated that education level is an important factor that affects anger management and tolerance.

As a result, it can be said that communication skills of athletes need to be increased in order to increase boldness and decrease disruptive aggression and passive aggression. As communication skills improve, the tendency to display aggressive behavior decreases.

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